‘Oh You Pretty Thing!’: How David Bowie ‘Unlocked Everybody’s Inner Queen’ in Spite of the Music Press.

This article focuses on the context, reportage and responses to David Bowie coming-out in the music press in 1972. By describing himself as ‘bisexual’ in a *Melody Maker* interview, Bowie became the first prominent male British pop star to label himself as non-heterosexual in the mass media.[i] He introduced a youth-oriented but widely accessible discussion of sexuality. The conversation explored the 1967 Sexual Offences Act’s complicated legacy and raised the questions of whether, even after decriminalisation, responses to queer people were ‘permissive’ and if the late-1960s and early-1970s were a period of sexual liberation. The Act allowed the press to discuss homosexuality in more detail and from varied perspectives, including those who identified as queer or homosexual.[ii] However, as Frank Mort argued, it cast homosexuality as a tolerable ‘private vice’ not part of public life.[iii] The press constructed and represented British sexual mores and negotiated a homosexual subject from this new social and legal context: through Bowie, music papers contributed to a broader conversation with a unique angle due to their conditions of production and understandings of their audience.[iv] The opportunity for debate was arguably ‘permissive’ but the statements made were typically conservative – particularly perceptions of queer people, their lives and identities.

The article will first explain the context and antecedents of these conversations. Then it demonstrates how the music press, and subsequently the popular daily press, narrated Bowie’s sexuality, and later that of other performers, to satisfy a putatively heterosexual marketplace. It considers the discourse’s effects, particularly in regards to queer individuals and scenes. Within a broader investigation of the 1960s and 1970s British music press that scrutinised over 1000 print issues and the Rock’s Backpages digital archive, I systematically identified articles that mentioned Bowie. This was informed by Adrian Bingham’s methodology for histories of the popular daily press and use of Stuart Hall’s distinction between the encoding of a text (the context and production), its content and decoding (how it is read and its effects).[v] The evaluation of production and reception drew from oral history interviews with music journalists and editors – there is no surviving editorial archive of any music paper – and an investigation of further press, archival and printed sources.

While this article is a work of press history based on empirical research, it develops insights made by queer theory since the 1990s. In particular, Judith Halberstram’s contribution to Judith Butler’s work on performativity and Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* that demonstrates how queer lives threaten the dominant logic of capitalist, white, western,

heterosexual society.[vi] The spaces and moments of queer life, she argues, 'are useful frameworks for assessing political and cultural change' or lack thereof.[vii] They challenge typically middle-class understandings of 'reproductive temporality'.[viii] Bowie presented strands of popular music, countercultural and underground knowledge. He, as a married father, combined elements of 'dangerous and unruly' adolescence with the heteronormative pursuit of longevity and the stable nuclear family.[ix] Halberstram uses William S. Burroughs' notion of 'junk time' as an analogy but perhaps Burroughs' cut-up technique is a more apt metaphor here (Bowie advocated the technique). The cut-up disrupts perceptions of order and normality: Burroughs' tape experiments speed and slow time, symbols and narratives are placed out of context and can be assigned new meanings. When analysing the Velvet Underground's 'homosexual behaviour', Matthew Bannister, informed by Foucault's *L'Homosexuality* argued,

> 'identification rather than identity is the key—to "be" homosexual is not so interesting as the possibilities of becoming or acting, which in turn suggests that subjectivities are constituted through engagement in various social discourses, rather than pre-existing, solid identities.'[x]

Bowie's statements and performance had certain parallels with the Velvet Underground's investigation of queer subjects, time and spaces. Bowie's performance used the subversive effect of drag, for instance, which Butler has argued undermines the 'uncritical appropriation of sex-role stereotyping from within the practise of heterosexuality.'[xi] Bowie's 'true' sexual orientation is therefore not important to this article.[xii]

Representations of queer identity in the media is, as Jodie Taylor argues, 'usually as limiting as the production of the heterosexual norm that it quite often mirrors.'[xiii] Considering the music press's youthful readership within its historical context however – the emergence of queer subjects from legally sanctioned repression – Bowie's statements and the subsequent discussion take on greater historical significance. Music papers sometimes reported conversations absent in other mass media. Paul Rambali, a music journalist during the 1970s and 1980s, explained that popular music had 'suggested a range of possibilities in life that nobody ever told me at school nor my parents.'[xiv] Popular music offers entry into diverse scenes where cultural texts and symbols are redeployed in many ways. Its audiences could interpret information reflexively like Burroughs' peer Allen Ginsberg shopping for images in the lonely Californian supermarket and finding Walt Whitman and Federico Garcia Lorca as well as artichokes.[xv] Reports on Bowie provided references for the 'queer bricoleur' and ways to access

to queer scenes without having to decipher innuendo.[xvi] These scenes or subcultures are fluid and complex and can harbour a number of varied interpretations.[xvii]

Notwithstanding chaotic subcultures, music papers' role as a cultural gatekeeper was, at the time, culturally powerful. They inhabited a culture of sexual secrecy, however, administered to satisfy advertisers, record labels and proprietors. Gilles Deleuze deemed this corporate power integral to the societies of control that emerged from disciplinary societies.[xviii] There had been non-heterosexual people in the popular music industry before, for instance, George Melly, Brian Epstein, Johnny Mathis and Dusty Springfield.[xix] Each kept their sexuality quiet and ambiguous: in 1965 Melly described homosexuality as a youthful phase and although a 1970 article in the *Evening Standard* discussed Springfield's sexuality the details were 'buried' following an editorial suggestion.[xx] The music press did not comment. The influential record industry mistrusted artists who transgressed or approached taboo themes in public. Compliance and deference could deliver financial reward as systematic promotion, along with other less savoury business practices, could boost performers' careers.[xxi] Caroline Coon, a former *Melody Maker* journalist, argued that closeting non-heterosexual performers was similar to how the Beatles concealed their girlfriends to seem sexually available to teenage girls (who bought a disproportionate number of records).[xxii] Halberstram noted that queer often denoted non-commercial. She argues that heteronormative 'common sense' considers success as comprising of 'advancement, capital accumulation, family, ethical conduct and hope' rather than 'nonconformity, anticapitalist practices, nonreproductive life styles, negativity and critique.'[xxiii] This failure can, however, be an element of queer resistance.[xxiv]

By 1972, pop and rock reporting often associated popular music's cultural practices with social change.[xxv] This new focus arrested the weekly papers' post-Beatlemania circulation decline and attracted over a million readers.[xxvi] Following a 1967 editorial by Maurice Kinn, who argued that readers deserved to read the truth about 'drug songs,' *NME*'s coverage focused less on music as simply 'entertainment.'[xxvii] This was followed by Brian Jones, one of the Rolling Stones, declaring a generational shift in consciousness and the summer of 1967 when psychedelia and the underground grew in notoriety.[xxviii] By 1972, after a relaunch by its editors, Alan Smith and Nick Logan, *NME* recruited journalists from the underground press.[xxix] Similarly, *Melody Maker* moved from jazz and folk reporting towards a 'New Journalism' influenced style that approached popular music more seriously with journalists who described how they immersed themselves in music and extra-musical scenes.[xxx] Jack Hutton launched *Sounds* in 1970 as a left-wing *Melody Maker*, the paper he had formerly edited.[xxxi] Smaller publications followed their lead. Music papers were based within central London and many journalists moved through cosmopolitan,

subcultural spaces. By advocating artistes who discussed or sung about urgent social issues and live music social's spaces, music papers had the capacity to introduce, often with careful hedging or warnings, potential psychic and physical spaces for rebellion and transgression.

Bowie challenged the music press's reticence to discuss non-heterosexual sexualities. When papers eventually discussed queer themes, however, papers rarely introduced what Lawrence Grossberg described as 'the possibilities of pleasure and identity' that had been offered to rock fans.[xxxii] Still, Dick Hebdige argued that 'Bowie was responsible for opening up questions of sexual identity which had previously been repressed, ignored or merely hinted at in rock and youth culture.'[xxxiii] Bowie introduced queer symbolism some without access to queer scenes due to their location, class or age. As Keith Gildart has argued, when Bowie introduced gay politics, he broached a previously 'irredeemably middle class' topic to music fans whose working-class identities perhaps complicated discussion of sexuality and queer sexualities due to their elite, metropolitan connotations.[xxxiv]

Non-Heterosexual Performers and the Press before 1967

The music press did not report on artists' sexual orientations until Bowie came out. Before 1967 candid reporting of non-heterosexual sexuality could prompt libel claims. Yet there were spaces for queer scenes. In Victorian Britain, sexual deviance had been 'consumerised' in the city.[xxxv] London, for instance, provided geographical spaces where elites could access a range of transgressive possibilities.[xxxvi] Soho's challenge to sexual, racial and establishment assumptions 'incubated' social change.[xxxvii] It provided sites for gay men to socialise illicitly before the decriminalisation of homosexuality. Non-heterosexuals could evade restrictions by using distinct languages and styles. Camp, for instance, allowed homosexuals to conceal and reveal themselves in social interactions.[xxxviii] However, Pamela Robertson argued that Oscar Wilde's trial, and the accompanying press interest, triggered an epistemic shift that resulted in camp becoming the dominant public impression of the 'homosexual-as-type.'[xxxix] The media constructed queerness within narrow parameters.

The popular daily press occasionally mentioned homosexuality but rarely regarding entertainers. Before it was decriminalised, queer performers and spaces of queer sociability operated illegally; the demand offered commercial opportunities despite the risk of prosecution. Music hall and nightclub performers performed drag and used double-entendre to communicate illicit sexualities despite concerns about arrest.[xl] Proprietors took risks to reach the 'pink shilling' allowed men to enjoy 'camp cabaret acts'.[xli] Defamation laws protected queer performers from

scurrilous reporting. Unless a homosexual was charged with sexual crimes, newspapers only covered homosexuality when they deemed it in the public's interest.[xlii] Papers were criticised for malicious reporting a number of times during the inter-war years.[xliii] Still, the *News of the World* frequently took advantage of the law concerning sexual crimes in the 1930s.[xliv] The press constructed scandals and built negative preconceptions about gay men in particular.[xlv] This had a malignant influence on some gay men who grew up between 1940 and the 1970s: as a respondent to a report on 1960s and 1970s psychological treatments for homosexuals explained: 'the newspapers were full of the most vituperative filth that made me feel suicidal ... my entire emotional life was being written up in the papers as utter filth and perversity.'[xlvi] The press construct placed queer scenes and life in direct opposition to heterosexual norms by stating binary distinctions between respectability and scandal, day and night, legality and criminality. The requirement to report 'in the public interest' compounded the negativity surrounding these othering tropes as they became attached to reports of crime and scandal.

By the late-1950s the decriminalisation of 'homosexual acts' was a political possibility, but the press cultivated a culture of disgust. Metropolitan sexual culture and concerns that gay men, who were not causing any particular harm, might be blackmailed and prosecuted prompted the 1957 Wolfenden Report to suggest decriminalising 'homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private'.[xlvii] Still, queer performers protected themselves from public assertions or allusions to their sexuality with libel laws. These laws were used when Władzio Valentino Liberace, a popular American pianist, toured Britain in 1956. Liberace remained closeted until his death but his persona, style and music irritated William Connor, a *Daily Mirror* columnist known as 'Cassandra.' The *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial* occasionally reported on homosexuality. Scandalous stories were being countered by increased sexual knowledge and ideas of 'toleration' and 'understanding.'[xlviii] Nonetheless, the *Daily Mirror*'s editor Hugh Cudlipp was rather homophobic and reporting retained negative and narrow impressions of queer subjects and scenes.[xlix] In 1952 Cudlipp commissioned Douglas Warth's three-part exposé of homosexuals in the West End.[l] This article 'stripped the subject of the careful euphemistic language in which it had always been concealed.'[li] Around the time of the Wolfenden Report, despite – contrary to many readers' sensibilities – endorsing its recommendations, the *Daily Mirror* disapprovingly reported homosexuals in universities, social clubs and implied that homosexuals posed a threat to children.[lii] When queer adults transgressed heterosexual time and space they remained in contact with adolescents and young people, but not in a position of parental or familial care. Reporters could colour these acts seedy.

Connor's article described Liberace as, 'the summit of sex - the pinnacle of masculine, feminine, and neuter. Everything that he, she, and it can ever want... a deadly, winking, sniggering, snuggling, chromium-plated, scent-impregnated, luminous, quivering, giggling, fruit-flavoured, mincing, ice-covered heap of mother love.'[liii] It played on gender dissonance, infantilised him and ridiculed his ostentatious style – he was not the responsible bourgeois father who read family newspapers. Queer symbolism was interpreted as 'chromium plated' inauthentic façade, the hidden and therefore deviant. Liberace instigated libel proceedings and won.[liv] He argued that the article 'hurt me … people stayed away from my shows in droves.'[lv] The 1952 Defamation Act contained a new provision for 'malicious falsehood' that punished the accused if 'said words are calculated to cause pecuniary damage to the plaintiff in respect of any office, profession, calling, trade or business held or carried on by him at the time of the publication.'[lvi] The hearing promoted the idea that homosexuality was a barrier to a 'straight' marketplace. Cudlipp and Connor tried to turn the case into a discussion of the press's role in society after Liberace's solicitor accused them of turning a 'decorous' newspaper 'sensational.'[lvii] Cudlipp responded, 'the newspaper changed its form and appearance to keep up with the changes we thought were taking place in society.' Music papers, however, had not defined such a social role by 1959 – they were willing stooges for the music industry.[lviii] They ignored Liberace during the trial – afterwards *Melody Maker* ran a small front-page concert advertisement.[lix]

Despite little coverage, a range of queer music existed before 1967. Jon Savage, a music journalist and historian, explained that pre-1967 records, released with little commercial ambition, escaped censure by advertising in illegal gay magazines, shops or clubs.[lx] Some queer records expressed sexuality openly but others drew on music hall insinuation reflecting how queer scenes created and hosted diverse musical, individual and sexual identities. The music hall songs had similarities with the double-meaning and Polari slang in the BBC's 1965 to 1968 light radio show 'Round the Horne.' Andy Medhurst notes that people knew they were listening to 'poofs telling a dirty joke', but it tickled a widespread comic sensibility which proves queer themes were not a barrier to popular success.[lxi] Yet, the dichotomy existed and, for those who invested in negative preconceptions and aspired to commercial success, the idea and stigma of outing could be troublesome.

The fear that outing could undermine a musical career and the music press's reticence to include discussions of homosexuality is demonstrated by the combination of financial pressures, paranoia and potential press scrutiny which preceded Joe Meek's suicide. Meek was a gay record producer who lived in Notting Hill with his partner, Lionel Howard.[lxii] Colleagues allege that Meek was frequently blackmailed.[lxiii] In 1963 he was arrested for 'importuning for immoral

purposes' in a Clerkenwell toilet. Yet the media paid little attention.[lxiv] Despite these concerns, in August 1966 he produced The Tornadoes' (an instrumental group who had a number one hit in 1962 – 'Telstar') song 'Do You Come Here Often?' as b/side for Columbia records.[lxv] The song ended with a short conversation between two men who observed the people around them and eyed two other men. A few months later, paranoia about being outed and questioned by the police due to an association with a prominent gay murder victim, drove Meek to suicide.[lxvi] Subtle allusions to non-heterosexuality were possible in popular music, but potential outing and prurient reporting could cause significant personal and professional anguish.

Meek feared police interrogation following 17-year-old Bernard Oliver's murder on 16 January 1967.[lxvii] The *Evening News* wrote, 'One of the biggest ever searchlights was turned on the twilight world of homosexuals.'[lxviii] Again the article relied on a cliché associated with the gay scene: it created a binary distinction between the normal daytime world of work and evenings at home with the city at night. On 2 February 1967, he burnt personal letters and erotic paintings, handed his assistant a suicide note, shot his landlord, Violet Shenton, and committed suicide. There was no contemporary reporting that suggested a link between Meek and Bernard or made any claims about Meek's sexuality. The music press barely reported Meek's death: despite success and fame, Meek remained an industry outsider. *Melody Maker* reported Meek's death in a secondary news column on page 18 between paragraph-long stories on Keith Richards and Donovan.[lxix] By 1967 the music press had begun to include more radical content but papers were afraid of printing a story that combined homosexuality, murder and suicide.

Some could decode queer messages in the media and music though. It could lead the interested and inclined to sexually diverse scenes. David Jones was born in Brixton in 1947. He grew-up in Beckenham, in Kent. As a teenager he attended concerts at the Marquee, the Scene and on Eel Pie Island, and performed in bands around London. One band, the Mannish Boys, appeared on BBC television to defend men's right to long hair less than twenty years after the Second World War where, under mass conscription, a generation of men had been subjected to military discipline.[lxx] As a member of the Riot Squad he discovered Soho and Notting Hill's subcultures. In late 1966, his manager gave him a tape of the Velvet Underground and Nico.[lxxi] Later as Lindsay Kemp's mime student, a saxophonist in Ronnie Scott's jazz band and a visitor to the Drury Lane Arts Lab, Jones further explored metropolitan scenes. Inspired, he founded an Arts Lab in Beckenham. London's bohemian counterculture with its links to a transatlantic underground, sexual scenes and Kemp's approach to continuously performed identities – life as art – shaped Jones's artistic endeavours. He translated not one single 'camp' subcultural style but a mosaic of queer and underground symbols drawn from cosmopolitan cultures.

Legally Sanctioned Sexuality and Bowie

David Bowie could not have come-out in a music paper without the decriminalisation of homosexuality. The 1967 Sexual Offences Act, which followed multiple attempts to pass Wolfenden-influenced reforms, allowed private 'homosexual acts' by those over 21. The Act went against public opinion, even by 1987 64 per cent of British people deemed sexual relations between two adults of the same sex 'always wrong' (admittedly following the AIDS panic and debate leading to Section 28 of the Local Government Act [1988] prohibiting Local Authorities from 'promoting' homosexuality').[lxxii] The 1967 Act did not decriminalise 'buggery' or 'gross indecency', but implied that the police would not prosecute people for private actions. In the short term it might have increased prosecutions.[lxxiii] Meanwhile, Roy Jenkins, the liberal Labour Home Secretary, described homosexuality as a 'disability' and the Earl of Arran warned homosexuals not to 'flaunt.'[lxxiv] The Gay Liberation movement critiqued the Act and the assumption homosexuality was aberrant.[lxxv] Decriminalisation opened a space to contest cautious toleration. Even so, conversations were mostly confined to existing sexual subcultures and, as the Birmingham Gay Liberation Front (GLF) explained, 'general sources of information; people talking; T.V., films and books.'[lxxvi]

In 1967 David Jones became David Bowie, to avoid confusion with the Monkees' singer Davy Jones. He was interviewed by *Jeremy*, a gay lifestyle magazine. [lxxvii] The article implied Bowie's sexual otherness and his photographs are quite androgynous but nothing is clear-cut. Bowie was unimpressed with a group of women at a Soho club performance but perhaps the author was belittling 'groupies.'[lxxviii] In 1971 he played a benefit for the GLF at Hampstead Country Club but he never offered them unqualified support. It was a tense time for the GLF. The week Bowie came-out in *Melody Maker*, the counter-cultural paper *International Times* (*IT*), which had few qualms about mentioning sex or sexuality, and supported Gay Liberation, reported how Michael Lynham, a GLF activist, received 14 days in prison and was fined £10 and £5 court costs after being caught 'importuning for immoral purposes' 18-months earlier.[lxxix] The magistrate opined: 'I am sympathetic to people of your feelings but I feel that homosexuals are a nuisance – like parked cars.' Lynham told *IT*: 'I don't acknowledge that the courts have any jurisdiction over me for my homosexuality or my gay personality'. To which *IT* editorialised, 'Once again the 1967 Homosexual Reform Bill is shown to be worthless.' There were concurrent trials for activists who had protested against the Festival of Light and two cases coming to trial. Lucy Robinson observed that the GLF fell apart around 1972 when Bowie became the most

prominent non-heterosexual performer.[lxxx] The GLF was beset by court cases and internecine squabbles (for instance, on 2 February 30 women left to create their own group).

Bowie's version of a 'gay personality' brought together a number of influences. He visited Andy Warhol and the New York scene in January 1971. Warhol in an act of queer scene-building had brought together 'Museum of Modern Art people next to the teenyboppers next to the amphetamine queens next to the fashion editors.'[lxxxi] Bowie began a weekly column in *Mirabelle*, a teen magazine.[lxxxii] The column was prosaic: it stressed his pop career, married life and fatherhood; if unusual in the sense that a man was giving make-up tips.[lxxxiii] It gently negotiated, challenged and destabilised myths about straight and queer identity. Cherry Vanilla, a Warhol acolyte who became Bowie's publicist and 'screwed' djs who played Bowie's songs, secretly wrote the column. New York and Warhol inspired Bowie's new character. Ziggy Stardust, a bisexual alien living five years before the apocalypse, introduced London culture to New York's queer scene and American cult musicians like Lou Reed and Iggy Pop (both of whom would later record with Bowie). Bowie incorporated the name 'Ziggy' (inspired by a London clothes shop); ideas from Vince Taylor, a 1960s rocker; and West End musicals. [lxxxiv] He adapted Anthony Newley's musical style which evoked queer connotations from musical theatre. Bowie's new style, which included Kansai Yanamoto jumpsuits and make-up, and an intensified media campaign were intended to re-launch his stagnating career.

Tony Defries, Bowie's manager, was apparently concerned that the industry and consumers would be unimpressed with ruminations on fluid sexual identities.[lxxxv] He was offering an impression of queer identity that was kaleidoscopic and celebratory, rather than the seediness the popular press had authored. Contrary to Defries' putative worries, within British popular music 'Glam rock' had emerged. The genre was an amalgamation of flashy musical influences and performance styles. [lxxxvi] This varied scene could harbour a number of identities that had some parallels with the performance identities that interested Bowie. Glam stars featured in the charts, music press, on Top of the Pops and played venues such as Wembley Arena. The performers, generally, contradicted rock's accepted 'authenticities' that privileged 'honesty' and conventional masculinity over space-age style and theatricality.[lxxxvii]

When Bowie first tried to come out in an interview the journalist omitted any reference. In early-1972 Bowie and his band promoted their 1971 album 'Hunky Dory' and prepared a science-fiction concept album, 'Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars' (which had developed from an attempt to write a West End musical).[lxxxviii] To gain media exposure Bowie's management arranged interviews with music papers. In January, Chris Welch interviewed Bowie in a West End pub near to *Melody Maker*'s offices. Welch omitted Bowie's discussion of sexuality.

Welch said: 'I think David was trying to get across to me that I should be writing about his new look and attitude – he was sort of coming out – but I wasn't taking the bait, so rather foolishly I tried to cover up in the piece by pretending he wasn't camp and gay.'[lxxxix] Welch, a veteran of the music press, adhered to more conservative commercial values.

Bowie's coming-out interview fell to Mick Watts, a younger writer. Ray Coleman, the editor, had recruited Watts for his local newspaper experience but, as his colleague Richard Williams commented, Watts was seen as a more mature writer than his contemporaries and wrote in music papers' new literary style.[xc] Watts, despite exhibiting knowledge of gay scenes, tactically underplayed Bowie's sexuality. In particular Watts used Bowie's family life, therefore his adherence to 'straight time', to make him seem less threatening to heterosexual conventions and, as the commercial logic dictated, improve his chances of commercial success. The article mediated Bowie's diverse use of queer symbolism and styles in a way that veered between knowing acceptance and reductive clichés illustrating common media misapprehensions rather than a nuanced impression of queer life.

Throughout the article Watts constructed Bowie's performance of queer identity through a narrow set of references. Watts introduced the article with a description of Bowie's looks and attire. This was usually reserved for female artists and immediately queered Bowie: women were frequently condescended with questions that focused on their position as a woman in the music industry rather than as musicians or entertainers. It implied that Bowie, as a queer man, existed outside the limits of straight time and space – the music industry. From outside he could affect women's fashions, and while not wearing a dress, he was described as looking 'yummy.' Bowie was *at work* rather than in private: a man wearing feminine clothes was not typically associated with professionalism.

Watts rehearsed deterministic, psycho-physiological notions of sexuality when Bowie was knowingly undermining the notion of a coherent sexual identity; Bowie illustrated that the performance of gender and sexual orientation is mimetic rather than a pre-discursive certainty.[xci] Watts' struggle with queer symbolism, gender dissonance and parody manifested in awkward jokes:

> David's present image is to come on like a swishy queen, a gorgeously effeminate boy. He's as camp as a row of tents, with his limp hand and trolling vocabulary … In a period of conflicting sexual identity he shrewdly exploits the confusion surrounding the male and female roles.

> 'Why aren't you wearing your girl's dress today?' I said to him (he has no monopoly on tongue-in-cheek humour). 'Oh dear,' he replied, 'You must understand that it's not a woman's. It's a man's dress.'

The use of the word 'boy' illustrates Halberstram's argument that queer subjects are associated with straight adolescence rather than queer adulthood. There are few 25 year-old male musicians who would have been described by a music journalist as a 'boy'; perhaps groups of men might have been described as 'boys' to insinuate male bonding and fraternity, but not individuals. The reference to Bowie's physical and vocal characteristics resonates with Foucault's description of how Victorian science classified homosexuality as 'everywhere present in him: written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away.'[xcii] The reference points used to describe Bowie as queer were, however, a historical jumble which reflects the piecemeal constitution of contemporary sexual knowledge. The discussion of unisex clothing, a contemporary trend, next to Victorian residues of sexology, demonstrates how not just life time, but historical time, is destabilised in attempts to comprehend and represent queer identity. Similarly, when Watts alluded to his knowledge of Britain's metropolitan gay subcultures he used Polari slang – a queer slang associated with Soho and the West End in the 1950s and 1960s. The article presented queerness as ahistorical and a straightforward singular identity as a leitmotif to develop. The confused way that number of historically, spatially and intellectually diverse ideas were deployed, like a cut up. This practice of representation, however unknowing, implied the actual complexity of queer identity that Bowie deliberately drew from. Still, overwhelmingly, the article's representation of queer identity is incongruent with accounts of 1970s radical subcultures, such as squatters in Notting Hill, or everyday reminiscences.[xciii]

Watts attempted to protect Bowie from his sexual otherness constraining potential commercial success. Watts' reporting was led by assumptions comparable to those in Taylor's analysis of 'failure.' Bowie's queerness threatened Watts' role as a conduit between the music industry and consumers. Bowie, too, while expressing a nuanced individual sexual identity seemed to be aware that he had to appeal for consumers' support. Like Peter Wildeblood's 1955 book *Against the Law*, Bowie mediated his sexuality for public consumption by constructing a 'homosexual persona' that could be justified in the face of homophobic sensibilities.[xciv] Bowie was in a less precarious position, however, he could both state and subvert camp references more akin to Lady Austin's 'camp boys' and practice within London's queer scenes.[xcv]

Doubting Bowie's claim to be bisexual was one tactic available. Watts reported how Bowie's spoke with 'sly jollity' and a 'secret smile'. This was supported by Bowie's use of

dramatic personae: Ziggy Stardust was an alien and Watts played on the difficulty in separating Bowie's self and his creations. This stressed the element of performance and could be used to justify Bowie within a continuum of provocative entertainers. Watts wrote, 'He knows that in these times it's permissible to act like a male tart, and that to shock and outrage, which pop has always striven to do throughout its history.' This placed Bowie within the romantic tradition of pop artistes who challenged society and musical convention. The music press's young, male, album-buying readers (who, broadly speaking, were music papers' most ardent readers in 1972) adored these outspoken and irreverent musicians.[xcvi] Watts, therefore, compelled the reader to judge Bowie upon his music rather than his image:

> Despite his flouncing, however, it would be sadly amiss to think of David merely as a kind of glorious drag act … Don't dismiss David Bowie as a serious musician just because he likes to put us all on a little.[xcvii]

To similar ends, Watts mentioned Bowie's family. He wrote, 'The paradox is that he still has what he describes as "a good relationship" with his wife. And his baby son, Zowie. He supposes he's what people call bisexual.' This statement can be taken in two ways. First, by presenting a family, Bowie exists within heteronormative time like the assumed readers and record buyers. He has a 'good relationship' which is antithetical to the historical context where homosexual relationships were widely perceived as seedy, precarious and only tolerated if hidden. It strengthened the idea that Bowie was putting-on the readers. Second, bisexuality could be portrayed as a sexual middle ground. It encompassed both normative and deviant sexuality. In 1972 bisexuality was more often associated with taboo breaking 'free love' rather than recognised as a discrete sexual identity.[xcviii] Therefore, while Bowie was referencing and implying a number of queer codes, Watts used a number of tactics to make Bowie seen straighter due to their understanding of the audience for recording artists and illuminated a number of negative preconceptions about queer people.

Press Responses to Bowie's Sexuality

Gay News' writers were unimpressed by the music press's response to Bowie's sexuality and had problems with Reed International, *Melody Maker*'s owners. A 1972 article criticised how journalists described Bowie after coming out:

> Bowie's theatrical, uninhibited professionalism when giving a 'live' performance has broken through many social barriers and taboos. And everywhere audiences have reacted enthusiastically to his assaults on accepted conventions and narrow minded morality. Mind you he has brought out the worst forms of imbedded puritanism from many rock journalists. But make no mistake if Bowie is *limp-wristed* then Mohammed Ali is *queen of the fairies*.[xcix]

The rightly saw reporting as naïve and somewhat homophobic. In 1973 Reed International's IPC Magazines department refused to print a small *Gay News* advert.[c] *Melody Maker*'s editors or journalists did not control advertising. It disappointed *Gay News*' staff: the paper's layout and writing style owed a lot to Reed's publications and particularly *Melody Maker*'s format. Previously, classified adverts for men seeking men had appeared in *Melody Maker*, the pithiest being, 'Attractive Guy, 18, seeks similar.'[ci] However, John Jones, IPC Magazines' advertising manager, responded that 'gay' and 'homosexual' were unacceptable terms. Other titles had denied *Gay News* advertising space too. The press's moral-commercial concerns were both a barrier to discussing queer themes candidly and prompted open discrimination when gay publications wanted to advertise.

After coming-out music papers discussed Bowie in features and reviews. They constructed the queer subject within a broadly similar frame to Watts. Chris Welch relied upon the music press's distinctive clichés in reviews of a 1972 concert at the Rainbow Theatre in London and Bowie's single 'John, I'm Only Dancing'.[cii] In the single review he made a gay joke and then the experienced critic deferred to a teenager's opinion. Rachel Hartsbeete responded, 'Nobody expects YOU to understand.'[ciii] But he should have, other than the bisexual lyric, 'John I'm Only Dancing' was not musically radical. The live review appreciated Bowie's 'theatrics' as reminiscent of Soho's Talk of the Town club.[civ] Welch fulfilled his role as a supporter of recording artists but the reviews demonstrate another rehashing of expectations about queer men: the invocation of youth and the reference to Soho places Bowie in a temporally, historically and spatially specific frame of dangerous adolescence, seedy night time entertainment and camp performance. Recognisable tropes pervaded articles in other music papers. In *Words & Music*, Ron Ross, later Bowie's product manager at RCA Records, wrote that Bowie was 'the most facile and the most profound of rock actors'– a restatement of the authentic/camp dichotomy.[cv] The article lingered on Bowie's metropolitan connotations by describing his aristocratic manners, 'satin ball gown' and uncharacteristic lack of makeup. In *Disc and Music Echo*, Rosalind Russell's article had a punning title: 'Bent on Success.'[cvi] Russell described Bowie's 'sartorial elegance' and

opulent surroundings, his 'cultured effeminacy' as 'a peacock among the pigeons in the music world'. She justified Bowie as an artist despite his persona: 'David isn't merely a rock/drag artist. He dresses outrageously because it makes an effect … And he has a lot to offer in the way of musical talent.'

Beyond press clichés, papers published opposition to Bowie coming out. His genre of music was defined by two derogatory monikers 'fag-rock' and 'rouge-rock', the latter term was preferred in the tabloid press.[cvii] Readers' letters were largely negative. Chas Flaxman from Letchworth told Bowie and Sweet to 'stop madly camping it up' and 'concentrate on the music.'[cviii] Gavin Dunett from Scotland saw Bowie as symptomatic of the 1970s failing to live up to the 1960s' promise.[cix] They rejected Watts, Ross and Russell's logic that Bowie's queerness was within the legacy of provocative, but successful artistes. This sentiment worried Dave Hill from Slade, one of the most successful working-class rock bands. Hill appropriated glam rock fashion without realising any queer connotations. He zealously confirmed his heterosexuality in a 1972 *NME* interview:

> You see big blokes looking like pouffes now – they may have glitter or make – up on, but the thing is that they look at it in a different way now.
>
> When I first did it, it was 'he must be queer,' but people have now accepted the fact that it's not true – so, therefore, the situation has matured.[cx]

The popular daily press tried to make Bowie seem straighter rather than attempt to meaningfully discuss his presentation of queer identity. Bowie's success coincided with *The Daily Mirror* and *The Sun* including more popular music coverage. *The Mirror* described Bowie as having, 'an image as camp as a row of tents on stage but he's just plain Mr. David Jones back home in Beckenham, Kent, where he lives with his wife, Angela, and their son, Zowie.'[cxi] Bob Hart described him as, 'leader of pop's powder-and-paint brigade,' and, evoking Cassandra's description of Liberace, 'the giggling glitter boy of the bendy-trendy camp-rock scene.'[cxii] Gordon Coxhill described Bowie as, 'the jiggling pouting prince who makes Marc Bolan look like a heavyweight wrestler.'[cxiii] Thus, while Bowie promoted some queer visibility, the press mitigated his queerness and used a lexicon of pre-1967 innuendo. The 'sex sells' tabloids blushed at queer connotations.

Rather than perpetuating a single ideology both news and music papers accommodated some alternative viewpoints. Binks from Derby saw Bowie as a positive ambassador for gay

culture, observing 'if Bowie is really gay then a few guys will have to take a second look at the gay world.'[cxiv]John Clayton won an LP voucher for explaining how the 'superstars … who can boast an appeal based on sexual dualism' were a 'new breed aiming to appeal to the whole family.'[cxv] In the *NME*, *Melody Maker*'s main competitor, Bowie's non-heterosexuality was associated with the rational and relative moral codes that had prompted 'permissive' legal change and the chance of greater social upheaval. Charles Shaar Murray, an ex-*Oz* and *IT* writer, reported on Bowie. Murray made the occasional flippant comment but his interviews did not apologise for Bowie's views or style. Murray's approach was reminiscent of the critical, consciousness raising ethos of the underground press.[cxvi] Together they undermined the statements that asked readers to accept Bowie as a musician and buy his records. He let Bowie critique the music press by asking him to respond to the terms that journalists used to describe him: *'funk, camp and punk.'* He responded that it was 'due to the general inarticulacy' of the 'small-minded.'[cxvii] Murray asked, 'Do stars arise to meet public needs, or are they created?'[cxviii] Bowie responded,

> The need is there in the people, but it does have to be pointed out. It may relate to repression in people that they may not have seen in themselves. And in my case there was a lot of sexuality involved.
> The letters I used to get from boys – and girls, strangely enough – said that they hadn't recognised their sexuality, or hadn't wanted to recognise it.

Bowie cast himself as an example for the sexually confused and repressed – queer fans. The article suggests that there was a number of queer people looking for influences to construct their identity and finding them in the world of popular music. Unlike the tabloids' caustic mix of clichéd insinuations, quality papers' more musicological and sociologically-minded discussion of Bowie constructed him as a talisman for spaces of queer sociability. This was seen as a significant step in queer representation. Martin Walker wrote in *The Guardian*,

> A self-avowed bisexual, Bowie has become the showbiz standard-bearer for the gay and drag scene in London, and they came, a parade of queens to celebrate the crown prince of Glam Rock. But Bowie's audience is larger than that, so much wider that he and the Glam Rock movement have become a sociological phenomenon of major significance for those who still use the flagging phrase, 'the Youth Movement.'[cxix]

Despite narrating a reductive notion of London's queer scene, Walker situated Bowie within a typically 1960s narrative of popular music and social change without undermining Bowie's claims to his sexuality.

While Bowie did not decisively shift general attitudes to sexuality, there is some credence to the notion that Bowie helped foster queer sociability outside of established gay scenes. *Melody Maker* reported how Bowie's tour gave gay men who were apparently isolated a place to meet. It might be a slightly condescending assumption, but, at the time, it could be taken as empowering. In *Melody Maker* Watts described the first meeting of Jim and Phil in Dunstable in a concert review,

> [Jim and Phil had] gone along to see David Bowie in Dunstable. Great fans of Bowie they were, and Jim had almost to pinch himself when he first heard such a grand person was coming to THAT place. He hated it. Privately his mother confided that he found it difficult to make friends at work.[cxx]

Here Watts showed sensitivity towards gay relationships that was, at that point, highly uncommon in music papers. He used a recognisable narrative of queer selfhood though: Jim is, for instance, close to his mother thus implicitly defined as young and effeminate. Bowie's performance Bowie's of metropolitan camp potentially extended the possibility of initiation into queer scenes through consuming a type of popular culture. When Bowie simulated fellatio on Ronson's guitar, Watts, perhaps using some poetic license, implied that this was a secretive code for the 'queer bricoleur':

> During the instrumental break Bowie began chasing Ronson around the stage, hustling him, trying to press his body close. The attendants at the exits looked twice to see if they could believe their eyes. The teenage chickies stared in bewilderment. The men knew but the little girls didn't understand. Jees-us! It had happened.

Watts and the unknowing 'little girls', a pun on Howlin' Wolf's 'Backdoor Man', were both shocked. The concert hosted a promotional junket for British and US critics. The opportunity to gain notoriety might have encouraged Bowie's exuberantly sexualised behaviour, particularly in light of how his behaviour was being reframed as generic musical rebellion. In contrast Jim and

Phil's more private, reserved actions had residues of 'private vice'. Notwithstanding, and at that point uniquely, Bowie's appearance was presented as a seismic event for gay men in Bedfordshire. After the show, 'Moist-eyed boys still hung around. After a while Jim and Phil left together.' Tellingly *The Bucks Herald*'s review did not mention any gay following or risqué behaviour.[cxxi]

By 1973 Bowie had crossed-over from cult acclaim to a mass audience after his performance of 'Starman' on a November 1972 *Top of the Pops* that Joe Moran, a historian of television, described as 'consensus-shaking'.[cxxii] Bowie's concerts' role as a site for gay men to meet was occluded by the papers' focus on the unruly conventions of post-1960s rock spectacle.[cxxiii] In *Melody Maker* Roy Hollingsworth reported on Bowie's concert at Earl's Court on 3 July 1973 where 'four Australian youths,' implied to be heterosexual, decided to 'dance naked on their seats – their antipodean genitals on view to all.'[cxxiv] To Hollingsworth's alarm, the men assaulted a woman. He commented, 'Now, it becomes no joke, my friends. Now it becomes horrible.' A fan attending the concert wrote of how she was trampled upon, flashed, and privy to an act of impromptu female-to-male fellatio and an act of impressively *in-time* male masturbation.[cxxv] She, however, reinterpreted it through a narrative of sexual freedom that placated her insecurities concerning her own sexual encounters: 'I suddenly realised that all the things I'd been doing were perfectly OK. Because here were people doing it with each other and sharing it. How wonderful … And I thought I'd never seen so many cocks in my life.'[cxxvi] It seems that Hollingsworth was portraying sexually aggressive and exploitative modes of heteronormative sexual liberation rather than Gay Liberation.

Hollingsworth's reservations, echoing Bowie's mid-concert instruction to the crowd to 'stop being silly,' annoyed a GLF representative.[cxxvii] Lyndall Stein deconstructed Hollingworth's review in a letter to *Melody Maker*, particularly the potentially homophobic use of words such as 'evil', 'perversion' and 'cult'.[cxxviii] Hollingworth was not prone to use hurtful language but the insinuation could be distressing when considering existing connotations regarding queer people and scenes. However, Stein explained how his words could cause upset,

> The point is not whether or not Bowie, Ronson, or Beck are gay, but if they are, or their fans are, it is no occasion for Roy Hollingworth to make attacks which are directed at all homosexual people ... There is no doubt that the super stud and super star aspects of Bowie's image have decadent implications, but that decadence has nothing to do with Bowie's implicit challenge to the straight notions of what women and men should be like.[cxxix]

The media's representation of homosexuals mattered to Stein. Bowie's performance as a widely accessible symbol of non-heterosexual sexuality and the responses to him took on greater significance as they were formative symbols in the creation of an un-closeted queer public. Reporting embellished a certain type of cosmopolitan camp and that his inclusion in narratives of liberation jarred with lived experiences, but that he was able to exist in public and question the idea of static sexual orientation was important. Nevertheless, when considering 'permissiveness' it is worth considering how male heterosexual sexual liberation that enabled violent or non-consensual sexual conduct – usually hidden in press reporting, particularly when carried out by those in positions of power – could obstruct debate and the liberation of oppressed groups.

Future Legend?: Gay Artists, Queer Personal Histories, Fans and Masculinity.

Bowie 'killed' Ziggy Stardust at Hammersmith Odeon and reinvented himself, temporarily, as Aladdin Sane before he moved onto other roles. Bowie's Ziggy Stardust character remained a symbol available for queer identity construction. To argue that he was the only source of information, however, undermines more nuanced understandings of non-heterosexual life histories, identities and, more generally, the legacy of permissive social and cultural change. His identity had been mediated to satisfy the press's commercial concerns providing a formula for artists to come-out while retaining commercial success. When Elton John officially came-out, in 1976, music papers were unperturbed. By then even television countenanced queer themes, for instance, ITV's *The Naked Civil Servant* documented Quentin Crisp's private life. In *NME* Mick Farren, *IT*'s *f*ormer editor, responded,

> So Elton John has confessed to being bisexual. Well, that's no big deal, but on the other hand it's never been much of a closely guarded secret.
> …
> 'The only reason I haven't spoken about it before,' revealed Elton in a frank interview … 'is that nobody asked me.'[cxxx]

It is notable that Elton John used the term bisexual and referred to Bowie's continued success as empowering. He said, 'I don't see why it should affect the fan worship that I've got … it hasn't hurt David Bowie.' John's album sales and chart positions remained comparable to his pre-1976 releases. Despite coming out in the music press, the first mass media coverage of his sexual

orientation was in *The Daily Mirror* in 1978. The titled 'Elton Owns UP' was filled with references to his gender neutral clothing and descriptions of his close relationships with 'older women.'[cxxxi] Little had changed: tabloids constructed the popular cultural queer subject as a comic figure.

Tom Robinson, a gay punk-associated singer and GLF activist, claimed that he saw Bowie as a role model. He argued this to Chris Brazier in an extensive *Melody Maker* interview:

> On January 15, 1972 (Tom remembers the date well), David Bowie was front-paged by the *Melody Maker* at the time of his 'Hunky Dory' album.
> Inside under the headline 'Oh, You Pretty Thing,' the matter of gayness was discussed in great detail. It made a resounding impression on Robinson.[cxxxii]

Robinson argued that Bowie had enabled him to be sexually open rather than 'teasing' like his mentor Ray Davis. Many gay 1980s pop musicians construct Bowie's coming out as guiding their approach to communicating their sexuality identities and informed encounters with gay scenes. Marc Almond, a 1980s pop star in Soft Cell, understood 1980s Soho to be full of 'prostitutes, junkies, pimps and creatures of the night, characters I imagined straight out the Jean Genet novels that David Bowie had urged me to read through his songs.'[cxxxiii] Almond understood gay-friendly spaces through the allusions that Bowie folded together. Stephin Merrit, the singer in The Magnetic Fields, argued that Bowie affected his life as a gay man more than the gay rights movement.[cxxxiv] Boy George, a gay 1980s pop star, explained how Bowie had given him self-confidence and offered a role-model.[cxxxv]

Bowie is a mythologised figure who can be written into narratives of permissive sexuality, gay liberation and personal liberation. In September 1980, he made some characteristically playful comments about his bisexuality in the *Daily Star*, "it got me a lot of publicity but it's also been a lot of fun. Telling the world about my bisexuality got me even more girls, because they were forever trying to convert me!'[cxxxvi] Two weeks later the paper deigned Bowie's coming-out as a significant events in a 'Sex Revolution' which included contraceptive dispensers, permissive legislation, hippies, the GLF and the pill.[cxxxvii] Jon Savage explained the significance of this in *The Face* in 1980. He argued that Bowie had not only suggested homosexuality in songs as others had done; he explained himself to the music press's readers and carved the discussion into pop culture.[cxxxviii] He later argued that Bowie's coming-out 'came five years after the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality and was an absolute godsend ... Bowie unlocked everybody's inner queen.' [cxxxix] The BBC explored similar themes in 2013 by asking: 'did [Bowie] change attitudes to sexuality?'[cxl] Again commentators argued how 'brave' Bowie was to come out in

Melody Maker shortly after decriminalisation. Paul Trynka, a Bowie biographer, argued that Bowie 'more than anyone else … blasted the closet-door off its hinges' and 'was a pioneer of sexual openness in Britain.'

Nevertheless, this presents Bowie within a simplistic liberation narrative that misses many of the cleavages in gay identity and the meanings assigned to those who were 'empowered' by Bowie to come out. In 1980 *City Fun*, a Manchester-based punk fanzine, illustrated some of these frictions. In a guide to Manchester's gay scene titled 'Definitive Gaze: A Fairy Tale' the writer described a number of distinct subcultures before mentioning DeVilles, a gay bar near Albert Square.[cxli] The author wrote, '"L" plates are optional. Many Bowie fans model their appearance on the man's previous incarnations. How long before the Elephant Man look catches on?'[cxlii]Bowie had recently appeared as the Elephant Man in a Broadway production. It suggested dressing like Bowie was naïve. It was an identity sanctioned through heterosexual understandings rather than the diversity found in queer spaces but nevertheless an identity easily found by the nascent 'queer bricoleur'.

Within gay scenes identities were more complex and varied than those suggested by Bowie's performance or at least the media's constructs. This was hinted at in *National Rock Star*, a short-lived 1970s music paper. David Hancock wrote,

> For his first manager Kenneth Pitt to say, "he became a symbol of freedom for a section of society which had previously been repressed," doesn't hold water.
> In fact the ordinary people kicking down the doors in those days were having to contend with Bowie who swished, camped and frolicked like some wild hermaphrodite ... [this] left a lot of gays having to do a lot of explaining. Not all gays are killer queens, honest dearie.[cxliii]

None interviewed by Matt Cook in his oral history investigation of gay men mentioned Bowie.[cxliv] Instead, they talked about the urban queer hubs that they encountered. Bowie mediated this world, but there were other ways in. Jack Babuscio's research into gay life experiences described varied experiences and insecurities when socialising in places where many identities were open for exploration.[cxlv] Less scholarly accounts concur with these sentiments. Stephen Pickles partially fictionalised memoire of Soho life *Queens* identified a number of discrete archetypes divided by subtle differences in style, language, attitudes, behaviour, sexual mores, employment and class.[cxlvi] Kate Charlesworth's light-hearted comics of men and women in the queer scene identified 46 examples, none resembled Ziggy Stardust.[cxlvii]

Similarly, the way that the wider glam movement, Bowie gave heterosexual men references to reconstruct masculinities does not guarantee that they accepted queer culture. Residues of the press's excuses and caveats, plus homophobia remain evident. David Branch conducted an ethnographic study of heterosexual men who enjoyed Bowie and glam rock during the 1970s.[cxlviii] As one of his respondents argued, 'Bowie and [Bryan] Ferry [of Roxy Music] were excellent role models because they showed that you could be whoever you wanted to be and change your look accordingly ... you just had to have the right attitude.'[cxlix] Branch, however, argued that although glam made heterosexual men attuned to 'bourgeois individualism', discussions of androgyny prompted swift assertions of heterosexuality. By the later 1970s the nascent punk and casual scenes were often seen in Bowie inspired garb.[cl] Punk performers and fans shared social spaces with queer subcultures, for instance London's Roxy Club had been Chaguaramas, a gay nightclub, and retained some of its prior clientele.[cli] However the punk scene was not exclusive gay-friendly. Indeed, if we return to the *City Fun* gay scene guide, an appropriation of queer symbolism did not correspond to accepting gay people: it reported Manchester's Bowie-styled 'Perry Boys' aiming epithets at gay men.[clii] Mancunian 'Perry Boys' were, as Ian Hough explains in his memoir, a complex subculture.[cliii] Yet, their stylistic homage to Bowie, that transgressed aspects of 'traditional' masculinities, did not automatically prevent homophobia.

Conclusion

It is often argued that the social and cultural changes associated with the 1960s came to fruition in the 1970s. 1960s legal changes, whilst couched in cautious and conservative language, enabled freer expression and sanctioned some previously illegal practices. In some situations, moments and scenes, people behaved differently, particularly some media-savvy young people. The way the music press reported Bowie's coming-out reveals much about the period's press culture and demonstrates that claims to Britain becoming a more liberal and open society, even during the 1970s, require significant caveats. Music papers show how queer discourse was regulated in the mass media and in particular when communicated to young people in a commercial context. The Music press's position was shaped by both promoting products in advertisements paid for by companies and its role as a consumer guide that introduced musicians and music to a record-buying and concert-going public. On a more profound level, music papers and popular music was laden with extra-musical messages and connotations. These references, however limited, formed a way that people could make sense of their lives and identities. Some voices in music

papers were intoxicated with the idea of a young generation that deviated from tradition, embraced the counterculture and, through literary writing styles, communicated feelings and individual investments.

Despite alternative sentiments, music papers' commercial prerogatives affected how they reported queer subjects. The perceived need to do so highlights a number of problematic assumptions made about queer people and scenes, assumptions that were endemic in society. Music papers, and indeed, wider society was scared by the destabilising effect of 'queer time and space.' Like the counterculture and youth rebellion, queer life could be portrayed as a challenge to traditional bourgeois institutions – marriage, family and work. When Bowie came-out, it seems like this challenge troubled reporters. Journalists mediated queer identity in a commercial context by prominently reporting Bowie's wife, child and position within a legacy of provocative, outspoken, but successful, musicians. The underlying notion was, however, that non-heterosexuals were unacceptable to some therefore uncommercial. This theory was furnished by understandings of queer subjects that mixed a blend of historical influences. These tropes included Victorian sexology and 'camp' performance in metropolitan gay subcultures and the music hall. Bowie as a participant in gay scenes and a 'queer bricoleur' had a more nuanced set of references, but this escaped most reporting.

Bowie's self-presentation, however, did not escape some people. Bowie used references drawn from complex scenes that could accommodate a number of narratives, symbols, individual and sexual identities. Those who had not encountered these scenes – the young or socially isolated – could appropriate elements of Bowie's identity and references for themselves while discarding the more uncharitable messages reported. There was a lack of information about homosexuality following decriminalisation and many gay men feel that Bowie affected them more than more conventional methods of disseminating knowledge about their sexuality. Notwithstanding the enduring challenge of homophobia and discrimination, the discussion about Bowie's sexual identity and queer culture was a noteworthy step in bringing Britain's previously hidden sexual cultures out of the closet. It gave some people personal solace and revealed part of a template to explore and realise their identities.

Notes

[i] Mike Watts. 1972. 'Oh You Pretty Thing!' *Melody Maker*, 22 January 1972, 19.
[ii] Davidson and Davis "'A Field for Private Members,'" 175-176; and Mort, 'Mapping Sexual London,' 95.
[iii] Mort, *Capital Affairs*.
[iv] Mort, 'The Permissive Society Revisited' 227-228; and Waters, 'Disorders of the Mind', 139.

[v] Bingham, *Gender, Modernity*, 16. Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding'.
[vi] Butler, *Gender Trouble.* Foucault, *History of Sexuality*. Halberstram, *In a Queer Time.*
[vii] Halberstram, *In a Queer Time*, 4.
[viii] Nyong'o provides in overview in, 'Do You Want Queer'.
[ix] Halberstram, 5.
[x] Bannister, "'I'm Set Free,'" 175.
[xi] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 187.
[xii] Bowie and Carr, *Backstage Passes*, 93 and134-136; Kent, *Apathy for the Devil*, 108-109; and Foxe-Tyler and Fields, *Dream On*, 61-70.
[xiii] Taylor, 'Scenes and Sexualities,' 7.
[xiv] Paul Rambali, personal interview 2011.
[xv] Ginsberg, 'A Supermarket in California.'
[xvi] Taylor, 'Scenes and Sexualities,' 7.
[xvii] Bennett, *Popular Music and Youth Culture* and 'Consolidating the Music Scenes'; Dahl, 'Femme on Femme'; Halberstram, *In a Queer Time*; and Taylor, 'Scenes and Sexualities.'
[xviii] Deleuze, 'Postscript to the Societies of Control'.
[xix] Stephens, 'Shaking the Closet' (Mathis). Smith, *The Queer Sixties*, 139 (Epstein). Robinson, *Gay Men and the* Left, 45-46 (Melly). Randall, 'Dusty's Hair!' 113-114.
[xx] Melly, *Owning* Up, 204. Ray Connolly. 1970. *London Evening Standard*, 5 September 1970. Connolly, 'Dusty Springfield told me the Sex Secret' *Daily Mail Online*, 21 June 2014.
[xxi] Charlesworth, personal interview.
[xxii] At the end of the 1950s teenagers consumed 25 per cent of all records. Abrams, *the Teenage Consumer*, 10-11. There is 'an absence of any sustained empirical work' on record consumers in the 1960s and 1970s, but studies suggest a great proportion were female: Harker, 'Still Crazy After all these Years,' 186-91. Coon, personal interview.
[xxiii] Halberstram, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 83.
[xxiv] Halberstram, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 83. Taylor, *Playing it Queer*, 209.
[xxv] Glen, 'Sometimes Good Guys,' 1-3.
[xxvi] Circulation data for *NME* and *Melody Maker* is according to Audit Bureau of Circulation figures provided by IPC Media (2010). *The National Readership Survey*, London, January-June 1972.
[xxvii] Maurice Kinn, 'The BBC and Drug Songs,' *NME* 14 January 1967, 8.
[xxviii] Glen, 'Sometimes Good Guys,' 55-73.
[xxix] Farren, *Give the Anarchist*, 338-344; Farren, personal interview; Gorman, *In Their Own Write*, 95; and Long, *NME*, 46-78.
[xxx] Charlesworth, personal interview 2011.
[xxxi] Gorman, *In Their Own Write*, 95.
[xxxii] Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out*, 10.
[xxxiii] Hebdige, *Subculture*, 61-63.
[xxxiv] Gildart, *Images of England*, 159.
[xxxv] Houlbrook, *Queer London,* 3; Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, 7-11; Cocks, 'Saucy Stories', 465; and Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, 1-7.
[xxxvi] Mort, *Capital Affairs*, 352-353.
[xxxvii] Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, 3.
[xxxviii] Roth, 'Homosexual Expression,' 268.
[xxxix] Robertson, *Guilty Pleasures*, 6.
[xl] Carter, *Dance and Dancers*, 22; and Houlbrook, *Queer London,* 56-57.
[xli] Houlbrook, *Queer London,* 80-83.
[xlii] Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, 144
[xliii] Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 146. Bland, 'Trial by Sexology?'

[xliv] Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship*, 281.
[xlv] Bengry, 'Queer Profits,' 168; and Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, 181.
[xlvi] Smith, Bartlett and King, 'Treatments of Homosexuality,' 1.
[xlvii] Wolfenden, *Report of the Committee*, 115
[xlviii] Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, 160-161; Pearce, 'The British Press and the "Placing,"' 303-316; Jeffrey-Poulter, *Peers, Queers and Commons*; Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship*, 265-280; 'Disorders of the Mind.' *Daily Mirror* 5 December 1957, 9.
[xlix] Dudley-Edwards, *Newspapermen*, 272. Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, 181. Pearce, 'The British Press and the "Placing,"' 306–8; Jeffrey-Poulter, *Peers, Queers and Commons*, 11–12; Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship*, 283–92; and Waters, 'Disorders of the Mind.'
[l] Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 371.
[li] Ibid.
[lii] *Daily Mirror* 27 May 1958, 6, and 13 December 1958, 9.
[liii] *Daily Mirror* 26 September 1956, 6.
[liv] Dudley-Edwards, *Newspapermen*, 250.
[lv] Ibid.
[lvi] Defamation Act 1952, Section 3 (1).
[lvii] Cudlipp, *At Your Peril*, 235.
[lviii] Glen, 'Sometimes Good Guys Don't Wear White,' 41-42.
[lix] 'Liberace is Back,' *Melody Maker* 6 June 1959, 1.
[lx] Jon Savage quoted in Petridis, *The Guardian G2* 4 July 2006, 22.
[lxi] Medhurst, *A Naional Joke*, 99.
[lxii] Repsch, *The Legendary Joe Meek*, 35-37. 'Arena: The Strange Story of Joe Meek' Dir. Alan Lewens.
[lxiii] Ibid.
[lxiv] The story received a paragraph on a London newspaper's front page, below news of Paul McCartney's admission hospital. *Evening News and Star* 12 November 1963, 1.
[lxv] The Tornados, 'Is That A Ship I Hear' / 'Do You Come Here Often?' (Columbia, 1966).
[lxvi] Repsch, *The Legendary Joe Meek*, 241-260.
[lxvii] *Daily Mirror* 21 January 1967, 2.
[lxviii] *Evening News* 22 January 1967, 1.
[lxix] 'Joe Meek Dies,' *Melody Maker* 11 February 1967, 18.
[lxx] 'BBC Tonight,' BBC One (c. November 1964).
[lxxi] Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock*, 121-122.
[lxxii] Park and Rhead, 'Personal Relationships,' 16.
[lxxiii] Moran, *The Homosexual(ity) of Law*, 126-129; and Campaign for Homosexual Equality, *Evidence to Royal Commission*.
[lxxiv] United Kingdom. Hansard House of Lords Debates, vol. 285 (1967); and United Kingdom. Hansard Parliamentary Debates, vol. 749 (1967).
[lxxv] Oram, 'Little by Little,' 67-76. Weeks, *Coming Out*, 204-206.
[lxxvi] Birmingham GLF, *Growing Up Homosexual*, 9.
[lxxvii] *Jeremy*, January 1970, 7-9.
[lxxviii] Coates, 'Teenyboppers, Groupies and Other Grotesques.'
[lxxix] 'News,' *International Times* 1 (112), 27 January 1972, 3.
[lxxx] Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*, 104.
[lxxxi] Warhol and Hackett, *Popism*, 3.
[lxxxii] Sandford, *Bowie*, 97-98.
[lxxxiii] *Mirabelle* published the column from February 1973 to May 1975.
[lxxxiv] Ibid., 73-74.

[lxxxv] Watts, 'Rock Giants from A-Z, Bowie; the Darling who put Glam into Rock,' *Melody Maker* (19 August 1972), 37.
[lxxxvi] For general histories of the genre's development try Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock*; Hoskyns, *Glam!*; or Thompson, *Children of the Revolution*.
[lxxxvii] Frith, 'The Magic'; Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out*; Stratton, 'Between Two Worlds,' 267-85; and Jones, *The Rock Canon,* 35.
[lxxxviii] David Bowie, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1972, RCA).
[lxxxix] Gorman, *In Their Own Write*, 156.
[xc] Williams, personal interview.
[xci] As argued in Butler, *Gender Trouble*.
[xcii] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 43.
[xciii] Cook, *Queer Domesticities*. Cook, 'Gay Times.'
[xciv] Waters, 'Disorders of the Mind,' 137-139
[xcv] Houlbrook 'Lady Austin.'
[xcvi] *National Readership Survey* (1972).
[xcvii] Watts, 'Oh You Pretty Thing!'
[xcviii] Udis-Kessler, *Bisexual Politics*, 19.
[xcix] *Gay News* 13, December 1973, 12.
[c] *Gay News* 8, August 1973, 4.
[ci] Ibid.
[cii] Chris Welch, *Melody Maker* 2 September 1972, 20.
[ciii] Ibid.
[civ] Chris Welch, 'David Bowie: Rainbow Theatre, London,' *Melody Maker* 26 August 1972,
[cv] Ron Ross, 'Phallus in Pigtails, or the Music of the Spheres Considered as Cosmic Boogie,' *Words & Music* July 1972 (RB).
[cvi] Rosalind Russell, *Disk and Music Echo*, 6 May 1972 (RB).
[cvii] *Daily Mirror* 20 January 1973, 22.
[cviii] 'Mailbag,' *Melody Maker* 12 February 1972, 78, and 4 November 1972, 72.
[cix] 'Mailbag,' *Melody Maker* 12 February 1972, 15.
[cx] Rob Randall, 'Yob Number One!' *NME*, 16 June 1973, 26-27.
[cxi] Deborah Thomas, 'King of Rock and Rouge,' *The Sun* 27 January 1973, 13.
[cxii] Bob Hart, 'Mr Spock Bowie has a New Spell,' *The Sun* 18 February 1973, 19.
[cxiii] Gordon Coxhill, 'Superstarman,' *The Sun* 29 February 1973, 16-17.
[cxiv] 'Mailbag,' *Melody Maker* 16 December 1972, 64
[cxv] 'Mailbag,' *Melody Maker* 19 February 1972, 15.
[cxvi] Murray Bowie
[cxvii] Charles Shaar Murray, 'David at the Dorchester: Bowie on Ziggy and other matters,' *NME*, 22 July 1972 (RB).
[cxviii] Charles Shaar Murray, 'Gay Guerrillas & Private Movies,' *NME*, 24 February 1973 (RB).
[cxix] Martin Walker, 'Lucky Glam Rock,' *The Guardian* 2 September 1972, 8.
[cxx] Michael Watts, *Melody Maker*, 1 July 1972.
[cxxi] *Bucks Herald* 20 July 1972 (LAGNA).
[cxxii] Moran, *Armchair Nation*, 212.
[cxxiii] Mick Farren, personal interview 2011.
[cxxiv] Roy Hollingsworth, 'Bowie: Waiting for the Man,' *Melody Maker* 19 May 1973, 28.
[cxxv] Vermorel, *Starlust,* 182-183.
[cxxvi] Ibid.
[cxxvii] David Hancock, 'King Queer or Joker?' *National Rock Star* 22 January 1977 (LAGNA).
[cxxviii] Lyndall Stein, 'Who's Scared of Bowie,' *Melody Maker* 4 August 1973, 64.
[cxxix] Ibid.

[cxxx] Mick Farren, 'Reg is Out of the Closet,' *NME* 25 September 1976, 9.
[cxxxi] 'Elton Owns Up,' *Daily Mirror* 6 November 1978, 22-23.
[cxxxii] Chris Brazier, *Melody Maker* 22 October 1977.
[cxxxiii] Almond, *Pleasure Palace*, 27.
[cxxxiv] Stephin Merritt, 'My Bowie,' *Out.com* 17 March 2013.
www.out.com/entertainment/music/2013/03/15/my-bowie-stephin-merritt
[cxxxv] Michael Ball, 'The House that Made Me,' Channel 4 (9 December 2010).
[cxxxvi] Rick Sky, Terry Willows and Fred Wehner, 'Bowie!: An Intimate Story of Drugs, Riches, Sex and Genius', *Daily Star* 15 September 1980, 13.
[cxxxvii] 'Sex Revolution,' *Daily* Star 29 September 1980, 40
[cxxxviii] Jon Savage, *The Face* November 1980 (RB).
[cxxxix] Jon Savage and Michael Bracewell, V&A Friday Events, London, 12 July 2013.
[cxl] Vincent Dowd, 'David Bowie: Did he Change Attitudes to Sexuality?' *BBC World Service* 23 March 2013. www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-21897627
[cxli] Eve Brown, 'Definitive Gaze – A Fairy Tale,' *City Fun* c. 1980, 8-9.
[cxlii] Ibid.
[cxliii] Hancock, 'King Queer or Joker?'
[cxliv] Cook, *Queer Domesticities*. Cook, 'Gay Times'.
[cxlv] Babuscio, *We Speak for Ourselves*, 19-25, 113-117.
[cxlvi] 'Pickles,' *Queens*.
[cxlvii] Charlesworth, *Exotic Species*.
[cxlviii] Branch, 'All the Young Dudes.'
[cxlix] Ibid., 41.
[cl] Ibid.
[cli] Perry, *Sniffin' Glue*, 1.

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